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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002218

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/05/2018  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: EXTREME RIGHT WING VIOLENCE REEMERGES AS  
DISTURBING ISRAELI ISSUE

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Late in the night of September 24, Israel Prize winner Ze'ev Sternhell was wounded in the leg by a pipe-bomb that exploded next to the gate of his Jerusalem residence. Sternhell, a political science professor known for his opposition to the settlers and the nationalist right-wing, is now recovering in the hospital. Jerusalem police searching the area around his home found fliers offering a reward of more than one million shekels (close to USD 300,00) to anyone who kills a member of the Peace Now movement. The fliers, signed by an unknown group calling itself the Army of State Liberationists, also condemn the entire secular Israeli state and call for the establishment of a state based on orthodox Jewish law in the West Bank. Security has been stepped up around the anti-settlement Peace Now movement and police investigators say they believe right-wing extremists are behind both incidents. Peace Now secretary general Yariv Oppenheimer says law enforcement must end its lenient policy towards lawbreakers before another political assassination occurs in Israel. The attack was quickly condemned by Israeli politicians across the full political spectrum, including Kadima Chairperson Tzipi Livni, Labor Chairman Ehud Barak, Likud Chairperson Benjamin Netanyahu, and even far-right Members of Knesset like Effie Eitam (National Union-NRP). While settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank has been building for months and recently even included assaults by settlers on IDF soldiers, it has not generated the kind of broad-gauged condemnation that we are now seeing. We will follow up with the Israel Security Agency regarding the threat posed by settler extremists. End Summary.

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NOT WITHOUT PRECEDENT  
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2. (SBU) While most Israelis associate political assassination attempts with the 1995 killing of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by right-wing student Yigal Amir, the targeting of rank and file left-wing activists by the far-right has a history here that includes the killing of Israeli peace activist Emil Grunzweig, during a Peace Now rally in Jerusalem, in February 1983. The rally, demanding that then PM Begin implement the Kahan Commission findings on the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon, was dramatically disrupted when a right wing activist hurled a grenade at the marchers killing Grunzweig and injuring several others, including Avraham Burg, later to become Speaker of the Knesset. Violence among Jews also has a history in the pre-state era, including the assassination by right-wing extremists of Labor Zionist leader Chaim Arlosoroff on the streets of Tel Aviv in the 1930s, and David Ben Gurion's decision to sink the Irgun arms ship the Altalena -- with Menachem Begin on board -- off the coast of Tel Aviv during the War of Independence. During World War II, left wing Jewish activists helped the British track down and sometimes kill leaders of the Jewish far right, including David Stern, the head of the Etzel underground group, which the British

dubbed the Stern Gang.

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LAW-MAKERS DEMAND ZERO-TOLERANCE OF LAW BREAKERS  
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13. (U) The shock waves generated by the Sternhell incident elicited quick condemnations from Knesset members and political leaders. Foreign Minister Livni called Professor Sternhell's family to express her sympathy and, at a Rosh Hashanah event at the MFA, said "something intolerable occurred which cannot be silenced." Opposition Likud Party leader Netanyahu also called the family, telling Sternhell's wife that "this is a sickening attack by abominable people who are not part of the public debate in Israel. They need to be distanced from society and placed behind lock and key."

Meanwhile, at a meeting of the Labor Party Knesset faction, Defense Minister Barak warned that "we are returning to a dark period...".

14. (U) The Knesset Committee on the Interior is planning a special session and its chairman, Labor's Ofir Pines, has demanded that law enforcement apprehend and imprison those responsible. His Kadima colleague, MK Menachem Ben-Sasson, who chairs the Knesset Law Committee, says the attack must not be dismissed as scare tactics. "It threatens the entire Israeli society." Ben-Sasson has issued a call to settler leaders and right-wing rabbis to put an end to attacks on those whose views differ from their own. Even MK Effie Eitam (National Union-NRP), a strong supporter of the settlement movement, condemned the attack, saying, "those behind this heinous act do not represent the values of Judaism and the

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love of Israel. My objections to Sternhell's outrageous opinions aside, I wholly object to any attempt to silence opinions through violent means."

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PEACE NOW: BUSINESS AS USUAL  
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15. (SBU) Yariv Oppenheimer, Peace Now Secretary General, told PolOff after the attack that he sees this action and the threats against members of his organization, as part of the recent pattern of increasing violence in the West Bank. He believes the violent right-wing extremists are emboldened by the fact that there have been little or no official response, even as violence escalates.

16. (SBU) Oppenheimer said that he had not seen the threatening flyer, except on TV, but that they are taking it seriously. However, he emphasized that Peace Now will not be deterred. While he had extra police protection in the morning of September 25, they had left by the afternoon. He said that no other members of Peace Now received additional protection, but Peace Now is meeting with the police to determine what steps should be taken. Oppenheimer added that, in some ways, "if they are not threatening us, we are not doing our job."

17. (U) Professor Sternhell is a highly controversial intellectual figure whose criticism of the settler movement is seen by the right as inflammatory. In an article that appeared in Ha'aretz at the height of the Second Intifada, he wrote "had the Palestinians the least bit of sense they would have concentrated their struggle against the settlements and would not plant explosives on the western side of the Green Line." This has been taken by the settler movement and others to go beyond freedom of expression, qualifying as incitement to kill settlers. Incitement to kill is illegal under Israeli law. Far-right activist Baruch Marzel, who was asked if his National Jewish Front had any connection to the Sternhell attack, denied involvement but would not condemn it "because in the past Professor Sternhell expressed views that it was legitimate to attack settlers."

18. (C) Comment. The attack on Professor Sternhell has touched a nerve. After months of media reporting on violent settler attacks on Palestinians (and recently even IDF soldiers and officers) in the West Bank that failed to generate much public comment, the failed bomb attack on Sternhell resulted in a welcome storm of condemnation by politicians, editorialists and commentators. Noted novelist A.B. Yehoshua in the September 26 Ma'ariv blamed the mainstream settler movement for having created an out-of-control monster among settler youth. Assuming that the fliers left near the scene of the bombing are genuine, they are directed not just against Peace Now but the entire secular State of Israel. We are engaging with the Israel Security Agency (ISA or Shin Bet) regarding measures they are taking to deal with this latest manifestation of extreme right-wing violence in Israel.

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